

***Changing practices and systems: Implementing the
online learning community at the University of South
Africa***

by

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SUMMARY

This study reports on the use of action research methodology to generate a critical reflective collaborative setting. The aim was to infuse the institution with the results of this study in order to stimulate debate on the issues regarding change in practice and systems.

The suitability of Internet communication technologies, more specifically the online learning community, is evaluated as a delivery mode that would address today's learning needs. This required the collaborative construction of knowledge in a community setting with the teacher enabling communication and interaction, and facilitating and stimulating the sharing and testing of ideas and constructs. But such a learning scenario was found to be significantly challenging to the current print-based learning experience. It implied a challenge to teaching and support staff as well as the questioning of the efficiency and legitimacy of current instructional design staff and procedures used.

The teaching responsibilities and commitment in the online community was outlined as against current print-based teaching practice. The current development and production culture, which restricts innovation and change in practice and systems significantly, came under pressure. The success of the online learning community in the Unisa context was nevertheless significant and it has the potential to serve as an opportunity to re-examine print-based production and delivery and to devise strategies and solutions to increase the quality significantly.

KEY TERMS

Distance education

Online learning community

Social constructivism

Collaborative learning

Internet communication technologies

Action research

Online facilitation

Socio-technical learning system

Knowledge construction

Learning development process

Fordist learning production

Post-Fordist learning production

Instructional design

Staff development

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